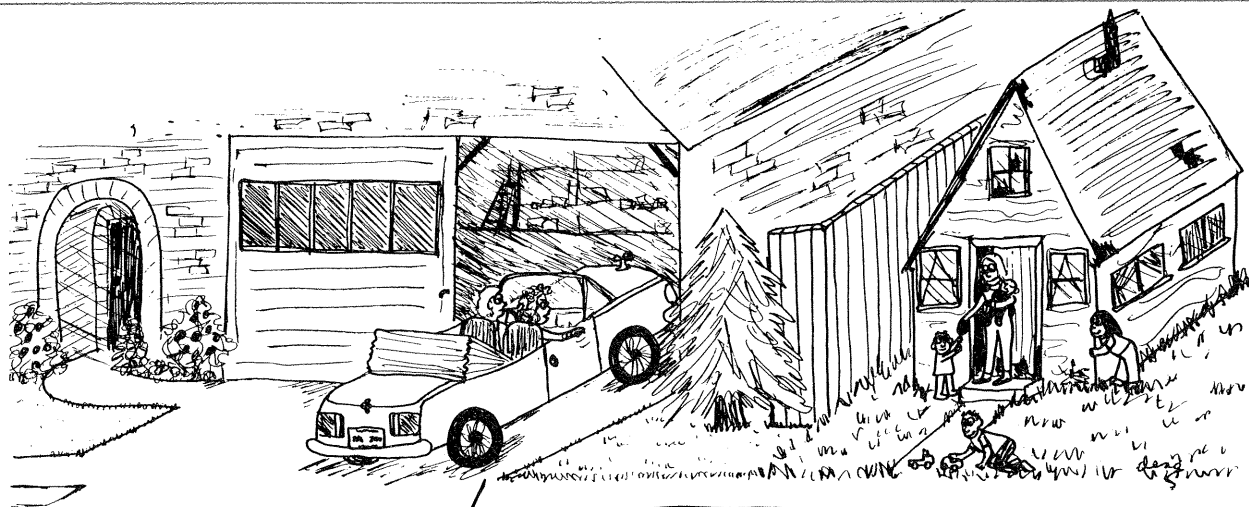


- Report No. 84
- May-June 1989

# Women's Concerns

Report



DEAR, YOU MUST BUY THAT PROPERTY NEXT DOOR  
SO WE CAN GET RID OF THAT EYESORE!

## Shelter, Housing,

## Homelessness

All of us need a sense of belonging. We search for roots and for a place that is ours. We want to be "at home" in our country and in our community. It is essential to feel that we are wanted. This sense of belonging need not depend on the quality or amenities of our housing but rather on the social connections and the attachment to familiar people. A shelter is not enough—we all need a home.

To meet the requirement of becoming a home, a shelter should provide:

- protection from the elements.
- adequate space.
- security from intrusion.
- some guarantee of tenure.
- light and air.
- a place to prepare meals.
- some measure of privacy.
- access to water and some means of sewage and garbage disposal.
- access to transportation to markets, education and medical services.

In this issue of *Report* we are not talking about housing in poor underdeveloped countries. In Canada and the U.S. housing is produced on the basis of the profit it makes for builders, developers, contractors and investors. Construction for the poor is not profitable. There is a housing crisis and solving it requires major policy shifts by governments.

Working on this issue of *Report* has been an education. The letters from contributors have made a lasting impression on me. One of them writes: "My involvement with the homeless has been a conversion experience. They have touched me and challenged me. It has caused me to evaluate my own lifestyle. Having seen, I can not longer close my eyes to the needs."

It is our hope that the articles will touch and challenge you.  
—Leola Jantz Epp

**Leola Jantz Epp** a member of the Committee on Women's Concerns, has served on the Family Concerns Committee of MCC Saskatchewan and is active on several ecumenical committees. A mother of six and grandmother of six, Leola is a former social worker with the city of Prince Albert. She and her husband Edgar live on an acreage outside Saskatoon where, until recently, Leola operated a goat dairy and conducted farm tours for school children and instructional tours for animal science students from the University of Saskatchewan. She spins the wool and mohair from the sheep and angora goats raised on their acreage, turning these natural fibers into handmade garments, toys and wall hangings. Leola and Edgar are members of Peace Mennonite Church, North Saskatoon.



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provided nothing in support, no medical insurance, little food in the house, and four months of unpaid rent, Sue once again faced eviction and the shelter became her refuge in her eighth month of pregnancy.

A church was supplying groceries and offering some support, but it was not enough. I decided to confront Joe about his problem and the effect it had on his family. He was angry but his three-year-old son softened his heart by saying "Daddy, if you wouldn't use drugs, we wouldn't have to go back to the shelter." Joe agreed to again enter the drug rehabilitation program and the church paid the rent so that Sue would not be evicted. Several couples in the church became their support system and the pastor visited Joe frequently in the center. With Joe gone, Sue once again was eligible for welfare, food stamps, WIC benefits, and medicaid. This relieved some stress in at least meeting the physical needs of the family.

The family has since been reunited. Both Sue and Joe are working full-time and child care has been arranged. Joe attends AA meetings nightly and several couples in the church continue to be their support system. The problems are not over, but there is hope. With constant care, support and counseling, Sue and Joe see the light at the end of the tunnel.

To me, this is what church is all about. Through our risk in becoming involved in brokenness, conversion takes place. Not only is hope restored to the one being helped, but we too are changed in the process. We experience more deeply our faith in action. Our lifestyles are challenged. Our time, talents, and money are all required. We feel uncomfortable because we are touching the poor and the brokenhearted. But the poor give to us a stronger faith and compassion for tough life situations. As we serve each homeless person, we see Jesus. By sharing our lives with homeless women and children, we all grow in strength and together build a community of hope.

*Names are changed to protect the individuals involved.*

**Linda Witmer worked as an MCC nurse in Guatemala for nine years. She then served as president of the "Bridge of Hope" board in its development stage and is still involved on the advisory board. She currently teaches public health nursing at Goshen College, Goshen, Indiana.**

by Linda E. Witmer

## Restored Hope

Sue and Joe were both from middle class families. Following their marriage many crises occurred. Joe became heavily involved in dealing and using drugs and when money ran out he used alcohol. Sue was frequently physically and emotionally abused particularly when Joe was under the influence of alcohol. During their seven years of marriage, Sue spent most of her time in and out of shelters. Due to abuse, eviction, and an unsteady income which was frequently used for drugs, Sue and her three-year-old son were forced to enter shelters while Joe lived in a car. With each eviction they lost all their belongings.

Joe made promises to change and went for drug rehabilitation numerous times. Sue attempted to rebuild her life although she lacked self-confidence that she could support herself and her child. Depressed and with little hope, Sue felt alienated from support systems, lacked self-worth and felt guilty for rearing her son in shelters.

Spending time with Sue, I realized her potential. Child care was arranged so that Sue could get some job training to support herself. A church helped furnish a one bedroom apartment, and she eventually found employment. Joe soon returned and moved in with Sue. Freed of drugs, he had a good job doing construction work. Hope was restored.

However, Sue became pregnant and Joe got back into drugs using all his wages on either drugs or alcohol. A complicated pregnancy forced Sue to quit work. With huge hospital bills, an unwanted pregnancy, an abusive husband who

In its study, *Women and Housing: Changing Needs and Failure of Policy*, the Canadian Council on Social Development reports that women in general have more trouble finding affordable housing in Canada. Women-headed families, women fleeing from violent marriages and a small portion of single women make up the majority of low income earners and have a problem finding, and paying for, shelter.

  
by Linda E. Witmer

## Women and Children: Their Plight

Homelessness in America is estimated around two to three million and rising. March 21, 1988 *Newsweek* quoted a recent national poll ranking homelessness as the countries number two problem—the national deficit ranking number one. The most disturbing trend is the growing number of women and children who are on the streets and in the shelters.

Why are women and children homeless? As with any problem, there are many intertwining contributing factors. Consider the following situation in Chester County, Pa. of a female-headed household:

—One woman with two children receives \$382.00 from public assistance and an allotment of food stamps.

—Food stamps can only be used for food, not personal hygiene or other miscellaneous items.

—\$382.00 must cover all costs for one month including rent, utilities, transportation, etc.

—Rent for a two bedroom apartment in Chester County is approximately \$325.00 per month not including utilities leaving \$57.00 for the month's expenses.

The above situation at first glance may appear to be solely an economic problem. However, there are also historical, sociological, and political factors involved. These can best be expressed in the context of three major causes: 1) housing shortage, 2) insufficient income, and 3) domestic violence and abuse.

### *Housing shortage*

The U. S. Mayors' Report states that the lack of adequate, affordable housing is the primary cause of homelessness. Housing advocates claim that the Federal budget for low-income housing has decreased 70% during the Reagan administration. Much low-income housing has been lost to condominiums due to increased prosperity of the affluent. Many landlords advertise low-income properties with the stipulation of no children. Frequently they require one month's rent on the first day of the rental period. There is often no lease, inadequate heat and utilities, and unmet promises that the house will be repaired. Some families double up illegally with another family and then suffer the consequence of eviction. With the loss of low-income housing and rising costs of rent, women and children are forced to make a choice between food and housing. Once can adjust food costs—not rent.

### *Insufficient income*

Many assume that people are homeless because they refuse to work. Women who explore the working world encounter overwhelming obstacles. Many lack adequate job skills to find employment which will provide sufficient wages and medical coverage. A full time job at the minimum wage of  $\$3.25 \times 40 \text{ hrs./wk.} \times 4.3 \text{ weeks} = \$559.00$  per month. Many employers only offer part-time employment to avoid paying benefits. Adequate child care is difficult to find. Reasonably priced day care centers or babysitting services are rare. Most child care is offered only during the daytime which does not allow for mothers who work evening and night shifts. Affordable personal and public transportation is also necessary for employment and almost impossible to obtain with a limited income.

### *Domestic violence*

In the December 12, 1988 *Newsweek* article on abuse it stated that 25% of all marriages experience problems of child abuse and family violence. Approximately 1.8 million women are battered and more than two million cases of abuse were reported in 1986. Many cases go unreported. Drugs and alcohol are involved in approximately 40% of all abuse cases. Women and children lack safety in their own homes and are forced to shelters or the streets. Not only is there physical abuse, but psychological abuse as well. Human dignity is destroyed.

These are only a few of the causes for homelessness among women and children. Others include illiteracy, racial discrimination, illegal aliens, psychiatric history and deinstitutionalization.

The U. S. Census Bureau reports that 34.6 percent of all female single heads of household live in poverty compared with 11.4 percent of male single heads of households.

Women and children are the most fragile of the homeless population. Women are vulnerable to crime, sexual assault, and hazards of the natural elements. Many are forced into prostitution and drug dealing to obtain food and shelter. A lingering fear among these women is that their children will be taken from them due to inadequate shelter. Some give up the right to care for their children. Others return to an abusive situation, while others end up on the streets. Those women face the potential loss of everything; family, friends, home, social support system, and human dignity.

Children are adversely affected by the unstable situation. They have no friends and no sense of belonging. They live in fear. Their physical and emotional needs go unattended. These children rarely see a medical doctor or dentist, have a high rate of immunization delay, exhibit developmental delays, are often undernourished and anemic, and are frequently victims of neglect and abuse. Access to treatment is limited because they do not meet the eligibility requirements and lack a permanent address. Because of their transient lifestyle, children are unable to attend school, resulting in illiteracy.

Temporary shelters provide a place of refuge. However, for most homeless women, the shelter only serves as a band-aid solution. Other solutions must be found offering time for them to explore alternatives and seek life-style changes. Many hunger for nurturing relationships and new direction. There is a need for an extensive supportive environment which provides a place to live and time to make changes. Transitional housing can meet this need.

The church has a biblical mandate to respond to the needs of homeless women and children. We, as Christians, must move beyond society's moral obligation to provide food and shelter for its members. The church should provide a refuge for the homeless, be a family and support network in the isolation and aloneness, and show compassion in the midst of despair. In addition, encouragement of our legislators to work for affordable housing is essential. Through our efforts, hope can be renewed in the lives of homeless women and children.

**Linda Witmer worked as an MCC nurse in Guatemala for nine years. She then served as president of the "Bridge of Hope" board in its development stage and is still involved on the advisory board. She currently teaches public health nursing at Goshen College.**



Lonely and lost, no where to turn  
the fire inside me no longer burns.

Spirit and faith slowly dwindles.

The voice of my children make me strong.  
Smiles from their faces keep me holding on.

A mother I'll be to the day I die  
If they take my children I'll weep and I'll cry.

I'll build myself back to the top  
So that the pain inside will somehow stop!

*—written by a homeless woman while living with her children in Coatesville's YWCA shelter.*

**"Income varies according to gender. Rent or mortgage payments do not!" Leslie Weisman—housing activist.**

by Margot Fieguth

## A Place

In 1983 my husband and I separated. My two children and I moved into a privately owned rented apartment. It was very hot in summer and repairs weren't always done, but it was excellently located with bus routes, stores, banks and post office within easy walking distance. In September, 1987 the landlord said he was raising the rent by 11 percent for 1988. I couldn't agree to this so in August, 1988 he sold the apartment.

In the midst of trying to find a new place I was asked to write down some thoughts on housing.

—It's amazing how much money Canadians pay to live alone. This is a fantastic way for developers to prosper. —It's insensitive to spend so much money on fancy housing when many people need and would be happy with basic housing.

—It's upsetting that people don't respect the housing they have.

—I was disappointed when people in my church simply encouraged me to get a better job or go to university so I could afford a better place. I expected Christians to stress faith in God and to realize that fancy apartments with new carpets, matching curtains and bed spreads, and new wallpaper are not top priority.

Recently, a lady at church asked if we were settled into a nice place yet. Without thinking of the blankets I was using for curtains, the hole in the laundry room wall, the plugged kitchen sink and the broken screen door, I cheerfully and sincerely answered "Yes!"

*Name withheld by request.*

**The author is 45 years old, has unsteady employment and receives support payments of \$6000 per year. Rent is \$800 per month plus utilities up to \$180 per month. Living in a city where inflation is high, she shows an amazing ability to cope with rising costs and her uncertain income. She supports by donation several organizations whenever possible.**

## Homeless in Toronto

The opening of the "2nd Harvest Food Bank" several years ago has given increased visibility to the thousands of homeless people in Toronto. In this city of 2,155,000 live 20,000 to 65,000 homeless people—depending on whose statistics one reads. 60,000 people regularly come to the Food Bank for extra groceries. Until then most Canadians thought of homeless people as the alcoholics, a few unfortunate souls who slipped through the social network and the people who chose to live this way.

The Food Bank has made us aware that our criteria for homelessness no longer applies. Lining up for food are single mothers with children, the working poor, young and old. What has changed in our city? The energy crisis, the congested roadways, the desire to be a part of the city's cultural life has encouraged middle-class people to move back into the downtown. They have bought up the rooming houses, (houses where the poor people lived) and renovated them into single family homes.

The FRIENDSHIP center, a drop-in center for the homeless located in All Saints Anglican Church downtown Toronto, is situated right beside a row of nice-looking renovated homes. Across the street a triplex is barricaded up. Written on the plywood windows are these words, "this home *was* a place for many." One's heart aches for the homeless but aesthetically one is drawn to the pleasing look of the refurbished homes.

Toronto, being such a cosmopolitan city, attracts many immigrants and refugees. The unemployment rate is very low at the moment so many people flock to the city looking for work. Rental accomodation is virtually zero. Two bedroom apartments cost over \$1000. There are no affordable apartments available. A single person on welfare, receiving \$425 is only allowed to pay \$300 for rent. Rooms are hard to find. A mother with two children



The poorer a household is, the higher the percentage of its meager resources is spent on housing. *Christian Science Monitor.*

receives \$970 per month. A large sum of money but not sufficient if a two bedroom apartment costs \$800. 43 percent of people on Social Assistance pay over one-half their income for shelter.

With the acute shortage of housing, landlords are charging outrageous sums for poor quarters and are very selective in their tenants. The poor, working for minimum wage of \$4.35 an hour (\$8625 per year) cannot afford the rent unless they share accommodation with someone. Many people live illegally with friends (i.e. without the landlord's permission). Welfare only comes into effect if a social worker approves of the accommodation and if the landlord agrees. Thus many of the poor, sharing accommodation, are not eligible for welfare payments. The *United Church Observer* states "25,000 people live illegally with some 100,000 legal tenants in 32,000 subsidized units."

The people on welfare receive money for drugs, transit, a Christmas bonus, etc. All of these benefits are not available to the working poor. Thus their pay cheque is usually spent before the end of the month and they go to the Food Banks for essential groceries. They cannot afford to pay the rent so many stay in temporary shelters. In one shelter for 70 people, nearly half of the men have full-time employment delivering flyers or some other job paying minimal wage.

Shelters for short-term stay are available. All require the people to leave for the daytime; they may return for the night. Since they have no lockers, most people will choose to cart their few possessions with them in garbage bags. Some of the shelters are so bad because of the people who go there, that people prefer to sleep in stairwells and other sheltered corners. Many spend hours in overnight coffee bars, movie theaters, and abandoned buildings. Fifty to eighty people will sleep in an abandoned building until they are found by the police and evicted. There is a great shortage of abandoned buildings in the city.

Drop-in centers exist for daytime use only. Here the homeless can gather to play games, visit, receive low-cost food, counselling and possibly a few hours sleep.

The shelters accommodating mothers with children allow the family to stay for three months maximum. Then the mother has to find another place. This means the children have to go to another school. Since these shelters provide no support service the mother always has to take the children with her as she looks for a place. This is a ready ticket for landlord refusal.

Homes for battered women with their children function differently. These homes provide counseling and supportive care to assist the women with their difficult situations. Most of these women are financially destitute, with their credit rating frequently tied in with their husbands. Apartments are usually not available to them, so many move into refurbished basement rooms in a house. Women in crisis do receive priority for subsidized housing.

The nurse working with the homeless feels that our social service network is geared to serve people with an address. Many poor people do not like to admit that they have no place. Young women leave the hospital with their babies and have no place to go. They have given the social worker some fictitious address.

The nurse also feels that society needs to become more aware of the desperate need for affordable and appropriate housing. Not everyone needs a one bedroom apartment. Boys and girls do not need to sleep in separate bedrooms as many apartment superintendents want to dictate.

Our working poor need to receive similar benefits to those on welfare to make working worthwhile. At the moment a mother with children is much better off financially on welfare. We must address the root causes of homelessness and provide more human rights and we must pressure our politicians to put money into these areas. Until we do, more and more people will be lining up for food at the Food Banks.

**Margot Fieguth and her husband Werner live in Mississauga, Ontario in an area where the economy is booming. They have two grown children who attend the College of Waterloo, Ontario.**



YESSIR, OUR ECONOMY IS BOOMING!  
WE ARE NOW A MAJOR WORLD CITY!

by Deanna F. Durham

Street kids are not included in the city's count of the homeless. As of September 1 the city had 5135 homeless families in the system including 10,799 children according to the Human Resources Administration. They stay in a system of 39 hotels and 35 shelters. New York AP (1988).

## Excerpts from

### "Homeless Children"

I was homeless

You said there was a housing crisis.

I was homeless

You said you could help if I didn't have so many children.

I was homeless

You said I should go back to my abusive husband.

I was homeless

You sent me to Social Services.

I was homeless

You said people on welfare are unreliable tenants.

I was homeless

You said I should go out and get a job.

I was homeless

You said I should be grateful to live in this country of opportunity.

I was homeless

You said the government has no money for public housing, we must use our limited resources to build nuclear submarines and minesweepers.

I was homeless

You did nothing.

*These are some of the frustrations expressed to Leola Jantz Epp by a young mother in a shelter for abused women as she tried to find a place she could afford when it was time for her to leave the shelter.*

Homelessness is a product of poverty. While there is no uniform profile of homeless families, the average homeless family consists of a mother with two or three children. The average child is six years old, the average parent is twenty-seven (Kozol). Because children comprise a significantly larger percentage of the homeless family population than mothers, it is imperative that we consider the devastating impact and daily struggles that homeless children encounter. Are we creating an institution which assigns homeless children at an early age to an imperiled life?

The majority of families have lived in doubled up situations before becoming homeless. The sheltering facilities are brief stops in patterns of instability and family disruption. Although most mothers grow up in the same geographic area where they are being sheltered, they have moved many times in the five years prior to becoming homeless.

According to a study of 80 families with 151 children residing in 14 family shelters and ten welfare motels in Massachusetts, approximately 33 percent of the families had lived in other shelters or on the streets, 48 percent had lived in hotels or motels, and 85 percent had been doubled up with relatives or friends in overcrowded apartments. Overall, one third had lived in a combination of two of these situations. In the year prior to becoming homeless, the pattern of instability seemed to worsen. During this time, the families had moved an average of four times, (Bassuk, Lauriat, Rubin, 1987).



by Carol Loeppky

In New York City, the average length of stay in the shelter system, whether it is in short-term barrack style housing, or one of the hotels or motels scattered around the city, is thirteen to eighteen months. However, Kozol found many families who reported that they had been living in a shelter for over four years. Not having a "home" can make healthy people ill, normal children clinically depressed, and those who may already be unwell significantly worse.

The likelihood of a child growing up poor is four times as great if she is born into a household headed by a woman, rather than a traditional two-parent home. The likelihood is even greater if the mother is a teen-ager. Of greater concern, is the fact that poverty is disproportionately represented by minorities.

For some children, Coles believes the longest and safest stay they will ever have in any one place is the nine months in the womb. "For nine months the infant grows in the womb, in a way grows ironically: the quarters are limited; at the end an x-ray shows the small but developed body quite bent over on itself and cramped; yet so very much had happened — indeed, a whole new life has come into being. For some hundreds of thousands of American children that stretch of time, those nine months, represent the longest rest ever to be had, the longest stay in any one place. From birth on for such children, it is travel and all that goes with travel — that is, forced travel, undertaken by (homeless) families, who roam the American land... in search of roots, and a resting place of 'home' (Coles)."

"For the approximately 500,000 to 700,000 homeless children in this country there is little rest to be known. Life in temporary shelters, in welfare hotels, in abandoned buildings or literally on the street offers little hope to a whole generation of children, youth, and families. If all of them were gathered in one city, they would represent a larger population than Atlanta, Denver, or St. Louis. Because they are scattered in hundreds of cities, they go unseen, unheard, unnoticed and carry with them the untold stories of pain and injustice (Hechinger, 1988)."

**Deanna F. Durham recently completed her MSW at Howard University and has written a paper on homeless children. She is the Director of the Educational Enrichment Program at the Community of Hope in Washington D. C. and works for an agency in the city which provides services to homeless families.**

## Warm, Dry and Safe

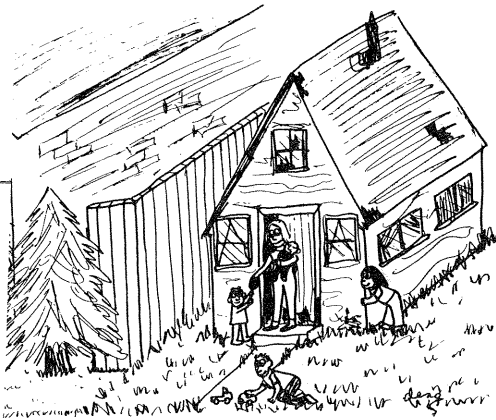
At some point in her life, Nancy Sexton had polio. Today, she has limited use of the right side of her body and can walk although it is difficult for her. She lives in a large, old house which was passed down to her and her husband through her husband's family. I met Nancy after they survived a chimney fire and were concerned with a possible reoccurrence. In such an emergency, Nancy would have difficulty evacuating quickly. While the chimney was the main concern, there were other things about the house that caught my attention too. Nancy drew her water with a bucket from a well outside the house. The outhouse at the end of the path was still in use. The house was not insulated and had poor and dangerous wiring. The siding was bare and unprotected from the environment.

We do not see street people in Appalachia. Here, where extended families are so significant, there is at least some place to sleep. However, it is sometimes small comfort to know that someone is housed. When the temperature dips below zero and you see the sun shining through cracks in the walls you know that the house does little to protect them.

So I arranged for a SWAP (SWAP is a youth service program sponsored by MCC. Groups come to Southeastern Kentucky to repair homes for people who have no repayment ability) group to work on Nancy's house. The chimney was repaired and the house rewired. In addition, it was primed and painted in the hope that its life would be extended by a few years.



**"Between 1970 and 1980 the number of low-income housing units nationwide dropped from almost 18 million to just over 6 million. Although some may believe that people are homeless because they refuse to work, studies actually find that many homeless people do work or want to work." Joseph Sorrentino, *The Philadelphia Inquirer*.**



The primary goal in working on the Sexton house was to make it safe. The chimney work and the rewiring accomplished that. Nancy's life, however, has not really been made much easier. When I drive past her place, I see the well and the outhouse and am reminded that she still has to walk the path and haul water.

When working on substandard housing, I become very focused; warm, dry and safe are the three key words. I was relieved that although we couldn't meet all of Nancy's needs, her house was safer because we had worked on it. In some small measure, we were able to meet her physical needs.

Nancy, while concerned about her own safety, expressed most appreciation for the paint job. She felt that her image in the neighborhood would improve because of it and that she was less likely to be ridiculed. Nancy had regained some of her pride. She needed to find some dignity and feel respected. A little of that happened too.

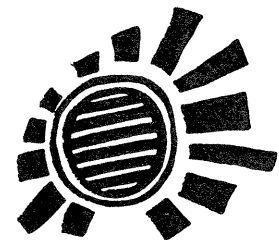
Abby Hall's situation also demonstrates how improved housing can affect many aspects of life. A student at the local community college and single mother of six children, she described her housing situation as depressing. I saw pictures of the house before it was renovated and would probably agree with her. Abby spent much of her time and energy just trying to keep the place warm. There was little privacy for her or her children. With remarkable determination, Abby set about to see that it was changed. Eventually she received a low interest loan and the house was literally transformed. I did not recognize the house from the pictures. Finally, the Hall family had a place they could be proud of. What I found particularly interesting in Abby's case though, was the fact that her grades at the community college improved along with her housing. Abby herself draws the conclusion that the two were unquestionably linked.

What appears as a less dramatic change but I think is just as important is the case of Laurie Hugg. She lived with her

handicapped husband in an old coal camp house. She says it was the worst in the neighborhood and not even worth trying to keep clean. Now she describes it as the prettiest. When I visited her in November, she was already planning for the spring and had purchased flower seeds. The house was neat and clean. Laurie now had something she could take pride in and was looking forward with hope.

Although Nancy, Abby and Laurie were not homeless, they had some of the same needs as homeless people. Having a place to stay does not necessarily make one warm, safe and dry or hopeful about the future. These examples demonstrate that fact. Also apparent, is the fact that improving the physical environment does more than just meet physical needs. It can help to provide hope and lifted spirits. So, whether we provide a place for someone who has none or help to improve the shelter of someone who does, we are building both lives and homes.

**Carol Loeppky has lived in southeastern Kentucky for three years. She is currently serving as co-program coordinator for the MCC Appalachia Service Program and is also developing study materials for youth groups who have participated in SWAP.**



The pain I felt has been dwindling.  
Spirit and faith has taken its place.  
Day by day the lights are flickering.  
Sunshine has once again set deep in my heart.  
I can awake feeling happy and joyous.  
Most of all, I can smile again.  
I'm ultimately building my way back to the top, one day at a time.  
What a glorious feeling!

*—written by an 18 year old mother while staying in a shelter.*

"I believe the ultimate success of a society is how well it treats its weakest members, the young, the old, the psychiatric patient and the homeless. Today, we are collectively failing a growing number of Canadians. Our homeless are not a political priority and since they are generally a non-threatening group, they are easily ignored." Lona Hegeman, *Saskatoon Star Phoenix*, Nov. 20, 1988.



  
by LeEsther Funk Defehr

## Homeless Persons with Mental Disease

The move to deinstitutionalize the people with mental disease in the early 1970's was not supported with adequate or sufficient community health centers or housing. Community mental health systems have generally not been able to respond effectively to the needs of homeless people because of inadequate government funding and agencies being short-staffed and overworked.

In addition, prolonged mental illness places a considerable burden, financially and emotionally, on individual families. Some families have reached their resource limit and can no longer accept their family member back into their homes. Many of the mentally ill become street people.

—"A significant proportion (one-third to one-half) of the homeless population has severe mental health problems, and the number of homeless persons is growing (Allard, p. 5)."

—"About 30% to 40% of the male homeless population and 80% of the female homeless suffer from a serious mental disability (Uhlhorn, p. 122)."

—"We should not continue to deceive ourselves that we have deinstitutionalized these patients; rather, we have created a new institution, an asylum without walls in which the homeless psychiatric patient is disgracefully abandoned to meander like a vagabond (Lipton)."

Emergency shelters have flourished and are a short-term effort that may be a step toward connections with permanent affordable housing, financial supports, or other legitimate sources of income. Homeless persons with a

mental disease may be distrustful of our systems, and may need periodic connections with the same shelter over a period of time to re-establish trust before a suggestion for permanent housing will be acceptable.

The majority of homeless persons with mental disease are without adequate basic necessities. They may have no family ties, poor job histories, and are easily victimized. Due to the nature of their disease they are frightened of authority figures because many of their prior contacts with the police or mental health professionals have resulted in imprisonment or institutionalization. Therefore, available resources are under-utilized.

"The dangers of being homeless are enormous, but in spite of this they seem to be out-weighed for many by the degree of freedom they experience and the tolerance for their abnormal behavior. The fact that people would choose this lifestyle has to say something about our mental health treatment system and our inability to understand or to help this segment of our mentally ill population (Uhlhorn, p. 123)."

Uhlhorn states that traditional mental health treatment or programs do not work for the homeless person with a mental disease. However, when these persons perceive that they do have choices, that they can have control over their lives, and that they will be treated with respect, then at some point in time they may choose not to be street victims. Uhlhorn (p. 124) suggests a three-phase approach to this problem:

Phase 1: The Emergency First-Aid Phase, with patching of mental health programs into existing shelter and agency programs and with training to shelter personnel and other agencies serving the homeless.

Phase 2: The stabilization Phase, with a place where a person could stay from five to seven days to clean up, rest up, have access to physical health care, services linkage, and fairly intensive daily mental health care. This may enable them to make a choice for some form of stabilized housing.

Phase 3: The Long-Range Solutions Phase, with connections to the Social Security Disability Program, Veterans Administration benefits, vocational rehabilitation programs and residential programs.

**LeEsther Funk Defehr is the residential program supervisor of MennoCare Inc., in Reedley, Calif.**

by Dorothy Bartel

## Land of the Innu

The word on Labrador, according to politicians and business people, is "Booming!" A new German Luftwaffe hangar is being built to house the war machines which practice low-level flying in Labrador. Its cost is estimated to be between \$35 and \$50 million. The reported cost of a hangar for the new detachment of Canadian F-18s is between \$6.5 and \$8 million (statistics from *Labrador Today*, Summer 1988). New businesses are opening monthly, and the building season saw many new houses springing up. This buoyant optimism brought on by an increasing military presence is not reflected by all segments of the local population.

In a protest camp just across a dirt road from the end of the runway, at CFB Goose Bay, Innu people have been living in their white canvas tents since September, even though the snow is falling and the wind is cruelly cold at times. Smoke rises from the chimneys. Inside the tents it's cozy and warm, and smells sweet with pine boughs covering the ground. "To be on the land and in the tents is 'home'," says Father Jim, their priest. "They recover a sense of who they are, and live in harmony with the land and with each other." This is a protest camp, rather than a hunting camp. But there are Innu people who spent long periods of time in fall and spring, camped in the country, following and hunting the caribou, which have been the mainstay of their lives for 9000 years. The militarization of Labrador is making that traditional way of life impossible.

The following is part of a news release from Airbase Camp, Ntesinan, October 12, 1988: "We are the Innu people of Ntesinan. Others call our land Labrador. We have always lived on our land. It has passed from generation to generation. We are the present stewards of our land which the last generation entrusted to us so we could pass it on to the next generation with all its bounty and beauty. We

live in Sheshatshit, the closest Innu community to the illegal airbase Canada has put on our land. Eight hundred of us have homes in the community but we spend a lot of our time living and hunting and fishing on our land."

"War planes bearing the insignias of Great Britain, West Germany and Holland, engage in illegal low-level flying and bombing practice over our land. Daily our people and the animals we hunt are frightened by these screaming jets which fly 100 feet above our heads. The government of Canada has also invited NATO to expand the illegal base into a full-fledged low-level flying and bombing practice center."

"We have never signed a treaty or other agreement giving Canada any rights on our land. We must fight back or our way of life will be totally destroyed."



These are the words of Innu people who are struggling, not only for a 'home', in the sense of a house, but the land which means 'home', which means survival, which means carrying on the traditions of the past while seeking ways to integrate those traditions into the future. In a statement made at a court hearing of those arrested for entering the runway, Mary May said, "I conclude, by repeating that

**"Homelessness is a condition in which individuals and families have no residence, owned, based or shared in which they can live safely, healthfully and legally both night and day, and in which they can meet their social and basic needs in privacy and with dignity." Coalition on Homelessness in Pennsylvania, June 1988.**

On October 11, 1988, in Whitesburg, Kent., Dan Danford completed the 2,100 mile "Miles for Homes" he began in April. Each mile Dan walked raised \$1.52. Pledges from 145 supporters totalled \$3241.00. The matching funds brings the total to \$9269.00. In addition the Housing Preservation Grant enables "Homes" to draw up to \$130,000. These funds are loaned to "Homes" clients to pay for major rehabilitation jobs.

the *land* on which we walked is *Innu land*—it is part of our homeland, Ntesinan, and we shall never stop struggling to keep it our own (Mary May Osmond statement at a just cause hearing on October 11, 1988).

My paraphrase of Amos includes these verses: "On the day when I deal with Israel (Canada) for all their crimes, I will most surely deal with the alters of Bethel (the military): the horns of the altar shall be hacked off and shall fall to the ground. I will break down both winter house and summer house; houses of ivory (DND offices) shall perish and great houses (hangars) be demolished." (3:14-15), and "These are the words of the Lord to the people of Israel (Canada): Resort to me, if you would live, not Bethel (military), (5:4-5). The Innu people resort to God, through fervent prayer and singing, while planning non-violent actions during the protests. Does God hear their prayers to retain the inheritance of their home and land, rising from within the screams of low-flying jets? An ugly specter overshadowing all of us is the millions of dollars available for building very adequate 'housing' for the instruments of death, and for the building, maintenance and practice of those very fighter jets, and the lack of recognition of the "home" of the Innu People, Ntesinan.

**Robert and Dorothy Bartel are MCC volunteers in Labrador. They are from Saskatchewan and have two school age children.**



## Resources

*Bridge of Hope* P. O. Box 1223, Coatesville, PA 19320

Bridge of Hope is housing for low-income, female-headed households who are seeking new direction in their lives. In a supportive environment from six to twelve months, women and children are encouraged to grow and seek lifestyle changes which will meet the needs of the family unit and aid in gaining independence and self-sufficiency. Bridge of Hope welcomes all women regardless of race or religion. Respect for each person's religious preference and beliefs will be granted.

*Community of Hope* 1417 Belmont St., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20009

Community of Hope exists to serve people in impoverished neighborhoods of Washington D.C. It offers health, education, legal services in addition to a service for families in transition. It provides transitional housing for otherwise homeless families along with social services, health care and housing counseling.

*Warden Woods Community Center and Church*, Toronto

On the east side of Toronto the Mennonite Church together with the city has built a church-community center called Warden Woods. The aim of this center is to provide a relevant resource for the subsidized housing community that it serves. Many of the people living here have encountered few trustworthy people, so the church tries to present a place of trust, of refuge; it tries to help the people become a community of caring people rather than individuals living for themselves.

A new film, "No Address", by Montreal filmmaker Alanis Obomsawin is now available in Canada from the National Film board. It deals with native homeless people in Montreal. She also produced the film "Mother of Many Children" and recently released a new album "Bush Lady."

In response to needs identified by the residents, day care, after school care, activities for seniors and disabled residents, and counseling services have been provided. Many of these programs are coordinated by church people and MCC volunteers. The programs' underlying function is to help the people to get to know each other, to reach out to each other and thus become a community to each other. The daycare is one example of this type of caring. If the mother is at home then she is obliged to come in for regular hours per week to help with the child care. By helping the hope is that she will also note the ways of the staff in handling children and imitate some of these child-rearing strategies herself.

Close to Warden Woods, Mennonite Volunteers staff another resident community center in two subsidized apartments housing 1200 people. This center has functioned well and meaningfully in serving the needs as the residents presented them. Weekly lunches and drop-in coffees were organized for the seniors. The teenagers got together for drop-ins and at Christmas would cook a big dinner for the seniors to raise money. After eating the good food and singing carols the spirit of goodwill between seniors and teenagers dramatically improved for awhile. The children readily came to special activities planned for them; the parents were more difficult to reach.

The community center also provides a focal point where the residents can gather together to discuss issues and work on common concerns. The residents have established a used clothing store which they operate from the ground floor of their apartment. In one year they raised over \$5000 which they used to fund other resident projects.

Several apartments are being renovated to service disabled people. There has been a dramatic shift over the years with seniors being replaced by young moms. Very few men live here.

The church and community centers of Warden Woods are going strong. To my limited understanding the church of Warden Woods best fulfills my image for Christians being in the world and not of the world, for being a light and a place of hope to the people around them.

#### *Mavis/McMullen Place, Vancouver*

Helen McMullen has since 1984 worked with "hurting women" in east downtown Vancouver. A former member of Warden Woods Mennonite Church, Toronto, McMullen retired to Vancouver in 1981. Her study there of downtown older women found the average age of death for these women was 56! McMullen found the causes of these early deaths, to be drug abuse, suicide, violence, alcoholism, disease. She volunteers at the East Side Women's center which serves the women who live in poor rooming houses and hotels. Some 60-100 women come there every day.

Last June Mavis/McMullen Place, a new apartment complex for destitute women opened. The 34 unit residence approved through B.C. Housing and mortgage corporation honors the 75 year old McMullen and Mavis Heppolite, an east side resident who was murdered in the early 1980's.

Although this is not a church project, area churches have helped. Peace Mennonite Church in Richmond B.C. where McMullen worships supports with offerings, food, clothing, furniture and repair. When praised for her care and devotion to Vancouver street women Helen McMullen says she simply does her part along with many others.

#### *Information from Vancouver Sun and Mennonite Reporter.*

*Menno Care, Inc.*, P.O. Box 512, Reedley, CA 93654  
(209)638-9585.

One attempt to provide residential care for the homeless person who has a mental disease is MennoCare, Inc., based in Reedley, Calif. MennoCare was established by Kings View Foundation in 1986 to develop and provide a community-based, comprehensive long term care program for persons with mental disease. Growing out of the Mennonite ideals of service through the alleviation of suffering and the healing of broken relationships in the name of Christ, the mission is the development and provision of human services in a Christian context.

MennoCare, Inc. operates nonprofit psychiatric rehabilitation programs, including licensed homes caring for five or six residents each. The goal of our program is to provide graduated levels of residential supervision, daily care, recreational activities, employment rehabilitation, emotional support, Direct Skills Teaching, and ongoing case management services. We seek to be client-oriented

## • Women in Ministry

- **Helen Quintella** was ordained as pastor of St. Paul Mennonite Fellowship in February.
- **Hedy Sawadsky**, Vineland, Ontario, and **Jane Miller**, St. Paul, Minn. were appointed members-at-large of the Christian Peacemaker Team Steering Committee.
- **Anne Neufeld Rupp**, Newton, Kan., former pastor at Alexanderwohl Church, Goessel, Kan., is the new chaplain at Meadowlark Homestead, Newton, a rehabilitation center for people with long-term mental illness.
- **Ruth Neufeldt** was commissioned in the fall as lay minister at Nutana Park Church, Saskatoon.
- **Norma Johnson**, executive secretary of the Commission on Education for the General Conference Mennonite Church, was licensed for ministry at Bethel College Church, North Newton, Kan.
- **More than 270 participants** gathered in Phoenix, Ariz. in November for the ninth **Women in Ministry Conference**. The conference included 15 workshops and the guest speaker was

Marilyn Miller, pastor at Boulder (Colo.) Mennonite Church. Future Women in Ministry Conferences are being planned in Pa. and Calif.

rather than program-oriented. We accept referrals from Kings View Hospital, County Mental Health Services, families, or from individuals themselves.

We also plan to establish a community home placement program in our area. This involves church congregations supporting individual families who will rent a room to a homeless person who has a mental disease. We want to create families for these folks and integrate them into our communities.

We need to overcome community and congregation resistance. One church in our area has a potluck the first Sunday of each month to which our residents are invited. After one such event, a resident remarked, "My goodness, they love you to death over there." It is a way to begin normalcy, and for us "well" folks to interact with people who have a mental disease and for all of us to lessen our unrealistic fears of each other.

The homeless persons who have mental disease need safe housing, financial assistance, medical care, vocational rehabilitation, mental health care, stable environment in which to make decisions, personal respect, and loving care. We have people in our congregations who need this attention. Family members need support. We need supportive congregations in addressing the needs of the homeless among us. MennoCare, Inc. is happy to respond to inquiries from churches, Alliance for Mentally Ill organizations, families, and individuals.

## Letters

- I've been enjoying the publications of *Report*. I appreciate the care given to the many issues of concern facing women. Enclosed please find \$10 for my continued subscription. —*Ethel Ranck, Indianapolis, Ind.*
- I have enjoyed the two issues of Mennonite Women Leaders Around the World and have been pleasantly surprised to see that many of these women have made significant contributions at a relatively young age. As a "younger" Mennonite woman working within the church I generally feel out of touch with these women who have similar interests and vocations.

I would like to propose a meeting of young Mennonite women in ministry at the Winnipeg World Conference in 1990. Anyone interested?

—*Jane Miller, St. Miller, Minn.*

- I received the July-Aug. edition of *Report* today—the first one I've received since last January! Is there a problem in the mailing office, or is this simply a problem of the postal system?

The reason I am writing is that I really appreciate *Report*. In fact, I feel I *need* it, for my sanity sometimes, and to keep me abreast of women's concerns in other parts of the world.

—*Helen Baergen, Cochabamba, Bolivia*

- Thank you for taking the time to put out issues about women. I look forward to reading the articles. —*Lorie Hershberger, Harleysville, Pa.*

- I have been on the *Report* mailing list for some years, and although I am a woman who strongly believes that women should be allowed and encouraged to use their gifts in all areas of life, nonetheless I have been disturbed at times by your rather militantly feminist viewpoint.

I was especially disturbed by the issue on Palestinian women. One article described how women in prison were expected to prepare food for their captors, and how they resisted this act of "oppression." Yet my thought was, if these women could only have followed Jesus' teaching to love their enemies by preparing food for their captors as an act of loving service, would not that have drawn them closer to the possibility of reconciliation? Their act of defiance merely intensified the tragic and seemingly hopeless conflict.

Christian women, especially Mennonite Christian women, should be promoting and working towards love and reconciliation, and not encouraging the defiant assertion of one's "rights." This self-oriented insistence on individual rights is one way that the modern Western world has gone off the track of the way of Christ, and I don't like the way this often seems encouraged in your publication.

Although many of your articles are interesting and worthwhile, I really am not interested in continuing to receive *Report*, so you may take me off your mailing list. May you continue to present your information in a way that is truly faithful to the gospel of Jesus.

—Alta M. Hodges, Limbe, Haiti

## News and Verbs

- **Lynette Youndt Meck** of Akron, Pa., has been named new executive secretary of MCC U.S. She will assume the responsibilities of this office July 1989, replacing J. Wilmer Heisey who will retire after serving in this position seven years. As executive secretary, Meck will oversee the 14 departments within MCC U.S. For the past five years, Meck has served as the director of the MCC U.S. Service Program, which has some 110 workers in 13 locations. Meck and her husband, Gerald, are members of Akron Mennonite Church. They have two children.

- **Charmayne Denlinger Brubaker** of Lancaster, Pa., has been named new secretary of MCC Information Services. She will oversee a nine-member department that produces print and audiovisual materials on MCC's program and concerns. Brubaker will begin this position in May, taking the place of Kristina Mast Burnett, who has been secretary of the department since 1978. Brubaker has been editorial assistant in Information Services since 1982. Prior to that she and her husband Omer served with MCC in Bangladesh. The Brubakers attend Akron Mennonite Church and have two sons.

- **Nancy R. Heisey** of Ephrata, Pa., has been named new MCC director of administration and resources and associate executive secretary. Heisey and her husband, Paul Longacre, are currently staff people for the Mennonite International Study Project. She served previously as secretary in MCC's Africa Department, as MCC country representative in Burkina Faso and as a worker in Zaire.

- Are you looking for a special speaker? **Resource Listing of Mennonite and Brethren in Christ Women** gives names and information about women interested in using their gifts and professional skills for kingdom work. Available free to institutions and \$2 to individuals. MCC Committee on Women's Concerns, Box M, Akron, PA 17501.

- The first Fr. Carl Schmitz Memorial Award was presented to **Dorothy Friesen** at St. Ferdinand Catholic Church on April 16, one year after Fr. Schmitz was gunned down in Mindanao by a member of the government paramilitary. Fr. Schmitz, a Passionist missionary priest from Chicago was an outspoken critic of illegal logging and landgrabbing in the province.

In accepting the award, Friesen pointed to continuing human rights abuses by the military. "It is important to realize that 83 percent of the Philippine military budget for procurement, maintenance and operations comes from the United States," she said. "That makes military abuse our problem too." Friesen is the founder of Synapses, a peace and justice network, and the author of a new book, *Critical Choices: A Journey with the Filipino People*.

- **Jan Lugibihl** of Synapses, Chicago, Ill., produced a slide set, "In Memory Of..." on the life of women, children and soldiers outside the U.S. bases in the Philippines.
- A **fact-finding delegation** of women of color will travel to El Salvador and Nicaragua. For more information contact Vivian Kinebrew, 898 Walnut Ave., Cincinnati, OH 45202.



Drawings by Dena Epp of  
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan and  
Cathy C. Coon of Newton,  
Kansas.

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permission.

- In an address to launch the **Ecumenical Decade for Churches in Solidarity with Women**, Zambian President Kenneth Kaunda says it is "primitive" for parts of the church not to allow women to preach or hold positions of responsibility. He also said legislation to protect widows will be introduced in the Zambian parliament next year.
  - **Sexual violence against refugee women** in camps and in flight from persecution, was discussed at an International Consultation on Refugee Women in Switzerland. The participants from 40 countries found that becoming a refugee increases the vulnerability of women to physical violence and sex discrimination. Rape, sexual assault and demands to procure sexual favours in exchange for food or safe passage were seen as acute examples of areas in which refugee women need special protection.
  - **Mardene Horst Kelley** has been appointed business manager at Goshen College. She joined the college staff in 1981 and became controller in 1985.
  - Churches have taken women's contributions for granted too long, United Methodist Bishop Forrest C. Stith of Syracuse said. Stith works with the Committee for the **Ecumenical Decade for Churches in Solidarity with Women**. He said, "the decade will make us focus on what has not been done to empower women—where they are hurting, where they are limited, where they are oppressed."
  - The first **churchwide gathering of Black United Methodist Clergywomen** was held in the Bahamas. Many of the 125 women, accustomed to being the only Black woman ministers in their communities or states gathered to share their experiences. In addition to the women from the United States, those present included clergywomen from Jamaica and the Bahamas, and three seminarians from Africa.
  - **Janet Beiler** has been appointed Voluntary Service Administrator, Eastern Mennonite Board of Missions. She served previously as administrative secretary in Eastern Board's Discipleship Ministries department.
  - **Barbara Lenards** is serving as public information coordinator, Glencroft Retirement Communities, Glendale Ariz. She served previously as public relations specialist at Mercy Medical Center in Minneapolis.
  - **Mary Sprunger**, First Church of Champaign-Urbana, Ill. has been awarded the Women's Lectureship Stipend by AMBS, Elkhart, Ind. This year at the seminary she is teaching one course each semester and does research.
- REPORT* is published bimonthly by the MCC Committee on Women's Concerns. The committee, formed in 1973, believes that Jesus Christ teaches equality of all persons. By sharing information and ideas, the committee strives to promote new relationships and corresponding supporting structures in which men and women can grow toward wholeness and mutuality. Articles and views presented in *REPORT* do not necessarily reflect official positions of the Committee on Women's Concerns.
- REPORT* edited by Christine Wenger Nofsinger. Layout by Shirley Stauffer Redekop. Correspondence and address changes should be sent to Chris Nofsinger, Editor, MCC, Box M, Akron, PA 17501.
- U.S. residents may send subscriptions to the above address. Canadian residents may send subscriptions to MCC Canada, 134 Plaza Drive, Winnipeg, MB R3T 5K9. A donation of \$10.00 per year per subscription is suggested.



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